

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 8667

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, TS

SUBJECT: NOUIRA ANNOUNCES CABINET CHANGE; CHEDLI KLIBI
TO MINISTRY OF CULTURE

1. PRIME MINISTER HEDI NOUIRA ANNOUNCED TO COUNCIL OF
MINISTERS ON DECEMBER 9 THAT CHEDLI KLIBI WAS NAMED BY
PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA TO BE MINISTER OF CULTURE. MAHMOUND
MESSADI, WHO HAD REPLACED KLIBI AS CULTURE MINISTER IN
NOVEMBER 1973, LEAVES CABINET. NO REPLACEMENT
FOR KLIBI AS MINISTER-DIRECTOR OF THE PRESIDENTIAL
OFFICE (CHIEF OF STAFF) WAS ANNOUNCED.

2. THIS AND OTHER CABINET CHANGES HAVE BEEN RUMORED
FOR SOME TIME, AND SOME MAY STILL BE IN THE WORKS.
MESSADI WAS REGARDED AS AN INEFFECTUAL AND DISINTERESTED
MINISTER AND IT IS SAID THAT KLIBI HAD "BEGUN TO GET ON
BOURGUIBA'S NERVES." KLIBI IS A LEADING TUNISIAN EXPERT
ON ARABIC LITERATURE AND HIS MOVE TO THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE
SEEMS DESIGNED TO RESOLVE PROBLEMS BOTH WITHIN THE MINISTRY
AND IN THE PRESIDENT'S STAFF. AS FAR AS WE ARE AWARE,
THERE IS NO DEEPER POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE.

3. COMMENT: WHILE PRIME MINISTER TOUIRA HAS FULL POWER
TO NAME CABINET MINISTERS IN HIS CAPACITY AS "ACTING
PRESIDENT," THE KLIBI NOMINATION WAS POINTEDLY ANNOUNCED
AS HAVING BEEN DECIDED BY BOURGUIBA HIMSELF. WE PRESUME
THAT THIS WAS DONE IN PART TO DEMONSTRATE THAT THE
PRESIDENT REMAINS IN FULL CHARGE EVEN DURING HIS
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CONVALESCENCE IN GENEVA. THIS IS ALSO ANOTHER EXAMPLE

OF THE CAUTIOUS MANNER IN WHICH NOUIRA HAS APPROACHED HIS
RESPONSIBILITIES AS "ACTING PRESIDENT," AS HE HAS CONSISTENTLY
SOUGHT NOT TO GIVE ANY INDICATION TO
BOURGUIBA OR ANYONE ELSE THAT HE IS USURPING PRESIDENTIAL
PEROGATIVES.
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